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Mushaben, Joyce Marie

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Misrepresenting America's Women: Trump's Three-pronged Attack on Gender Equality

JOYCE M. MUSHABEN

Even before Donald Trump swore to “uphold and defend” the Constitution on January 20, 2017, concerned US citizens were bracing for a shock regarding the rights of women and minorities. World-wide women’s marches on January 21 offered some quick comfort, but demonstrations alone provide no real defense against a barrage of presidential executive orders challenging equality gains of the last four decades.

Prior to the inauguration, Trump’s transition team began identifying State Department personnel and initiatives installed by Secretary Hillary Clinton to foster gender equality abroad, e.g., campaigns against gender violence and activities promoting female economic, entrepreneurial, diplomatic and political participation (Landler 2016). Trump plans to cut US foreign assistance by 37%, assuming that US Americans pining for greatness “have to start winning wars again” (Daalder 2017). His war against women continues on multiple fronts, posing major challenges to America’s historical image as a vanguard of feminist mobilization through the 1960s and 1970s. Already lagging far behind their European counterparts in terms of descriptive and substantive representation, US women are encountering an Orwellian redefinition of what it means to be feminist even at the symbolic level, based on three concrete examples.

Descriptive Representation: “Women Should Be Seen But Not Heard.”

Despite the land-slide character ascribed to the 2016 elections, women’s share of national legislative mandates has remained constant; they still occupy 104 Congressional seats (78 Democrats, 26 Republicans), accounting for 21% of the Senate and 19.1% of the House seats. While the number of female governors dropped from six to five, three new Democratic Senators raised the total of women with minority backgrounds to four, the highest number to date. Based on current projections, US females will not reach parity representation until 2121, despite accounting for 51% of 321 million citizens (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2013). Their physical presence in Congress says little about their ability to control government appointments or public policy, however.

The new White House team harkens back to a time when politicians and corporate bosses were free to discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion and national origin, later banned by the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Among the Trump Cabinet appointees, 85% are white, 75% are male; seven boast of no previous government experience; two more are retired generals lacking civilian management credentials. Most are millionaires and billionaires: Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, for exam-

ple, claims a net worth of \$2.5 billion, exceeding the combined wealth of Obama's 2008 Cabinet members (\$115 million) and even that of George W. Bush's first-term appointees (\$200 million). The Executive Wing is full of shady characters; three, including "the Donald," had allegedly engaged in sexual or domestic abuse, forcing one nominee to withdraw. Trump's national security advisor was then fired for denying he had pocketed direct payments from Russia (Center for American Progress 2016).

Trump's first Supreme Court appointment favors eliminating what's left of the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision guaranteeing abortion rights. Calling himself an *originalist*, the new Supreme Court Judge Neil Gorsuch promises to interpret the Constitution as intended by its authors – slave-owning white men who ignored Abigail Adam's 1776 appeal to "remember the ladies" and even forgot to include a Bill of Rights until 1791. Not surprisingly, Trump moved quickly to eliminate federal funding for inter/national Planned Parenthood activities, covering a wide spectrum of reproductive health services.

More shocking was an unprecedented Republican effort to apply another "gag rule" to a female Senator who dared to oppose a controversial Cabinet appointment. Now serving as US Attorney General, Jeff Sessions is an arch-conservative from Alabama whom even Republicans had rejected for a federal judgeship in 1968, based on his racist opposition to the 1965 Voting Rights Act. On February 8, 2017, Elizabeth Warren (Democratic Party, Massachusetts) spoke out against the Sessions nomination, reading a letter from Coretta Scott King that had blocked his earlier appointment. Entered into the 1986 Congressional Record, a key passage read: "Anyone who has used the power of his office as United States Attorney (in Alabama) to intimidate and chill the free exercise of the ballot by citizens should not be elevated to our courts." (King 1986) The widow of Martin Luther King Jr. accused Sessions of using "the awesome powers of his office in a shabby attempt to intimidate and frighten elderly black voters," (ibid.) by pursuing "politically-motivated voting fraud prosecutions" (ibid.: 3) against civil rights leaders. Confirmation would have granted him "a life tenure for doing with a federal prosecution what the local sheriffs accomplished twenty years ago with clubs and cattle prods." (Ibid.: 4)

Leader Mitch McConnell (Kentucky) quickly invoked Rule 19, prohibiting any Senator from directly or indirectly imputing any conduct or motive unworthy of that office to another member. Born out of a name-calling fist-fight between two South Carolinian members in 1902, Rule 19 was not applied when Ted Cruz (Texas) accused McConnell himself of telling "a-flat out lie," nor when David Perdue (Georgia) shamed Charles Schumer (New York) for a "tear-jerking performance (...) (meriting) a Screen Guild Actors Award" when he opposed Trump's travel ban against seven Muslim countries. On February 9, 2017, two male Democratic Senators read the King letter into the Congressional Record a second time, without admonition, suggesting only female Senators should be "seen but not heard."

Substantive Representation: “Gender as a Pre-Existing Condition”

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) has been a veritable life-saver for millions of women: The uninsured rate among working-age citizens fell from 22.3% in 2010 to 8.6% by 2015. Prior to enactment, 16% of the 41.8 million uninsured were full-time workers (and dependents), trapped in low-wage jobs: 46% of those facing a “coverage gap” were white, 18% Hispanic, and 31% Black. Known as Obama-Care, the ACA required insurance companies to include preventative services like prenatal care, mammograms, pap smears and immunizations – all without co-pays. Equally significant, insurers could no longer refuse coverage for pre-existing conditions disproportionately afflicting women and minorities, like asthma, arthritis, diabetes and hypertension (Shavers et al. 2012). Before the ACA, women could be denied pre-emptive HIV treatment and trauma counseling following sexual assault.

Despite their majority, House Republicans could not rally the votes for their first “repeal and replace” assault which would have stripped 14 million off their new insurance the first year. Their second attempt led to a May 4 signing-ceremony in the Rose Garden, featuring Trump surrounded by an overwhelmingly white male audience. The 2017 American Health Care Act (AHCA) deletes the very provisions that rendered Obama-Care a blessing for women; it re-empowers the states to exempt insurance companies from providing treatment, or allows them to charge extra for female-specific “pre-existing conditions.” Acne, heart disease, cancer, menstrual problems, past pregnancies or a previous Caesarian section can disqualify them from affordable care, as can rape or domestic violence. “Pro-life” lawmakers ignore the fact that US women are six times more likely to die during/after pregnancy than e.g. Scandinavians; the Center for Disease Control reports that roughly 60% of such deaths are preventable (Martin 2017). As Planned Parenthood president Cecilia Richards declared, “being a woman is now a pre-existing condition” (Bryant 2017). Mitch McConnell named a 13-member, all-male panel (including himself), to craft a Senate version of the AHCA, which fails to represent the nation’s diverse health needs even in geographic terms: Two are from Texas, two from Utah and two from Wyoming, along with one each from South Dakota and Tennessee: 8 Senators from 5 of 19 states that refused to expand Medicaid coverage to persons whose resources fall between 44% to 100% of the federal poverty line. The rest stem from Arkansas, Colorado, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The smallest states (Wyoming: 569,000 residents; South Dakota: 858,000) hold three seats, while the panel excludes members from all but one of the five most populous states covering 93 million residents (California, New York, Florida, Illinois). Four are over 70; if female, only one would be of child-bearing age (39). When challenged as to why the five Republican women were not included to ensure consideration of childbirth, breast and ovarian cancer, an aide replied: “(W)e are not interested in playing the games of identity politics” (Irby 2017).

Symbolic Representation: From Fake News to Fake Feminism

Fact-checking manifold claims made during the first 100 days of the Trump Administration, a Washington Post team registered 492 false or misleading statements directly attributable to the president, including 16 “outright lies” (Kessler/Lee 2017). Forced to interact with the First Daughter during her March visit to Washington D.C., Chancellor Angela Merkel invited Ivanka Trump to the G-20/W-20 (women’s) summit in Berlin on April 25. Claiming she had come to “listen, learn and seek advice,” Trump insisted that her father was a “tremendous champion of supporting families,” drawing audible groans from the audience. “He encouraged me and enabled me to thrive. I grew up in a house where there were no barriers to what I could accomplish,” she added, labeling herself a feminist when questioned by the moderator (Hill 2017). The media jumped on Merkel’s hesitation to label herself as such, although she has clearly done more to advance work-family reconciliation, corporate quotas and STEM (MINT) training for women than all of her male predecessors combined (Mushaben 2017).

Never mind that Ivanka Trump actually grew up in multiple mansions and possesses a \$50 million trust-fund, conditions that would make it easy for any woman to succeed. More disturbing is her failure to recognize that if women and men were really equal, she would not need a self-proclaimed billionaire father to “give” her opportunities. Her public concern for working women contradicts her private tolerance of their exploitation at Chinese factories producing her multi-million dollar clothing line. Required to work 57 hours a week and paid well below the urban minimum wage (\$255-283 versus \$620), less than a third of those “exclusively licensed” to produce the Trump brand receive state-mandated insurance benefits (Hartwell 2017).

Conclusion

Concerning *descriptive representation*, Warren’s stance is reminiscent of the Declaration of Conscience issued by first House-, then Senate member Margaret Chase Smith in 1950, urging her fellow Republicans “not to ride to political victory on the Four Horsemen of Calumny-Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry, and Smear” during the anti-communist show-trials of the McCarthy era. Reflecting on a country “psychologically divided” by the “cancerous tentacles of ‘know nothing, suspect everything’ attitudes,” she criticized the Senate for allowing itself to serve as “a rendezvous (...) for selfish political gain at the sacrifice of individual reputations and national unity” (Smith 1950, 622-623). Trump wants to “win” every and any political contest, no matter what its actual cost to citizens.

A new breed of Republicans shares that mind-set. Oblivious to questions of substantive representation, their rush to victory on “repeal and replace” (having failed to offer an alternative plan for seven years) defies common sense: How can a health system that deliberately excludes women who earn less, live longer and experience more chronic diseases become financially sustainable? People denied coverage ine-

vitably resort to extremely expensive emergency room treatment. The Congressional Budget Office has not released estimates for the latest bill; the first would have “saved” \$337 billion by stripping 24 million of insurance.

If Ivanka Trump’s version of feminism takes root among the Millennial Generation, we are in deeper trouble than we imagined the day after the Inauguration. When it comes to symbolic representation, I would rather have an eastern German CDU Chancellor on my side than a billionaire’s daughter who has yet to comply with US ethics standards regarding her fashion business at home and abroad. We can only hope that the next three and half years will not suffice to eliminate the gains made by an entire generation of real feminists.

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Frauen in der französischen Politik in Zeiten des Burkini-Verbots: Von Marine Le Pen bis Christiane Taubira

EMILIA ROIG

Die französischen Präsidentschaftswahlen im April/Mai 2017 waren von der ambivalenten Präsenz von Marine Le Pen als einer von zwei Kandidatinnen geprägt.¹ Obwohl feministische Bewegungen die erhöhte Partizipation von Frauen in der Politik forder(te)n und eine Frau als französische Präsidentin feiern würden, kann dies aus feministischer Perspektive aber nicht Marine Le Pen sein.

Jean-Marie Le Pens Tochter ihrerseits ist sich der Vorteile bewusst, die ihre weibliche Identität mit sich bringt. Der Erfolg von Marine Le Pen und die Entdiabolisierung des Front National (FN) beruht nicht nur auf Le Pens Distanzierung von antisemitischen Positionen, die nicht zuletzt im Parteiausschluss ihres Vaters 2015 deutlich wird. Bezeichnend ist auch Marine Le Pens ‚Frausein‘ und ihre Darstellung von angeblich intrinsischen weiblichen Werten. Kaum distanzierte sich Marine Le Pen von einigen den Holocaust leugnenden Äußerungen ihres Vaters, wurde plötzlich eine als rassistisch, anti-feministisch und gefährlich betrachtete Ideologie von Teilen der französischen Presse und Öffentlichkeit als akzeptabel und sogar ‚feministisch‘ oder Frauen-beschützend eingestuft. Die politische Linie der nationalistischen Partei erscheint nun gemäßigter, zumindest in der Selbsteinschätzung der Partei und der Beurteilung einiger Medien. Doch Marine Le Pen lässt sich leicht als Duplikat ihres Vaters entlarven. In anderen Medien wird mitunter auf die ‚Maske‘ (Brynholte/Hayot/Lauren 2017; Fourest/Venner 2012) von Marine Le Pen verwiesen, die ihr wahres Gesicht verstecken würde, um ihren Zweck – einen größeren Anteil der Wähler_innenschaft für sich zu gewinnen – zu erreichen. Im Klartext meint dies, dass das von Marine Le Pen verfolgte politische Projekt – trotz ihrer Weiblichkeit – genauso unerbittlich rechtsradikal ist wie das ihres Vaters. Um jedoch dem FN ein harmloseres Image zu verpassen, mobilisiert Le Pen das Bild der emanzipierten europäischen weißen Frau, deren Freiheit und körperliche Unversehrtheit von ‚barbarischen Muslimen‘ bedroht werde. In ihrem Kampagnen-Clip profiliert sie sich unter dem Banner des Femonationalismus² als Beschützerin von Frauenrechten.